FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

A SENSE OF THE CHURCH

PRESENTATION #2

JANUARY 16, 1993

SATURDAY EVENING BANQUET

JOHN M. BUCHANAN, PASTOR

FOURTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, CHICAGO

SCRIPTURE

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-5

MATTHEW 16:13-18

"...YOU ARE PETER, AND ON THIS ROCK I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH..."

-MATTHEW 16:18 (NRSV)

DO YOU HAVE TO BELONG TO THE CHURCH TO BE A CHRISTIAN?

CHARLES IVES SAID THAT "THERE MUST BE A PART OF THE SOUL ALL MADE OF TUNES." I THINK ABOUT THAT ON OCCASION

BECAUSE THERE ARE A LOT OF TUNES PLAYING AROUND IN MY SUBCONSCIOUS JUST BENEATH THE SURFACE, AND OCCASIONALLY, FREQUENTLY ACTUALLY, ONE COMES TO THE TOP OUT OF NOWHERE, AND I FIND MYSELF LISTENING TO IT, OR HUMMING IT. ONE OF THE TUNES THAT DOES THAT FOR ME IS "THERE'S A CHURCH IN THE WILDWOOD." DO YOU KNOW IT? Never Heard it sung in P. C. before

I WON'T SING IT, BUT HERE ARE THE WORDS: let's do it -

"THERE'S A CHURCH IN THE VALLEY BY THE WILDWOOD,

NO LOVELIER PLACE IN THE DALE:

NO SPOT IS SO DEAR TO MY CHILDHOOD

AS THE LITTLE BROWN CHURCH IN THE VALE."

THE SECOND VERSE:

"HOW SWEET ON A BRIGHT SABBATH MORNING

TO LIST' TO THE CLEAR RINGING BELL

Its tones so sweetly are calling
O Come to the Church in the Vail

Refrain
Men - Come - Come Come
Women - Come to the Church in the Wildwood
Come to the -- -- -- Dale
No place is so dear to my childhood
as the little brown church -

ITS TONES SO SWEETLY ARE CALLING,

O COME TO THE CHURCH IN THE VALE."

THE REFRAIN IS THE BEST PART. THE MEN SING:

"O COME - COME - COME - COME,"

WHILE THE WOMEN SING:

"COME TO THE CHURCH IN THE WILDWOOD,

COME TO THE CHURCH IN THE DALE. NO

PLACE IS SO DEAR TO MY CHILDHOOD AS THE

LITTLE BROWN CHURCH IN THE VALE."

I HAVE NEVER SUNG THAT HYMN IN CHURCH. I ASKED DR. SIMMONS WHAT HE THOUGHT AND HE SAID HE THOUGHT WE OUGHT NOT TO RUIN THAT RECORD. IT'S IN THAT PLACE ALL MADE OF TUNES, I THINK, BECAUSE MY FATHER LOVED IT. HE SANG IT A LOT. HE MAY EVEN HAVE SUNG IT TO ME. ~~AND~~ I HAVE OFTEN WONDERED WHY HE LOVED THAT HYMN SO. ONE THING I KNOW FOR SURE IS THAT HE NEVER WENT TO A "LITTLE BROWN CHURCH IN A VALE." I KNEW HIS CHURCHES AND THEY WEREN'T LITTLE BROWN CHURCHES.

AND THEY WEREN'T LITTLE BROWN CHURCHES.

THEY WERE THE FIFTH AVENUE METHODIST CHURCH - NOT FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY. THIS IS FIFTH AVENUE IN ALTOONA, PENNSYLVANIA, ABOUT FOUR BLOCKS FROM WHAT WAS, IN HIS CHILDHOOD, THE LARGEST RAILROAD FREIGHT YARD IN THE WORLD, THE PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD'S STAGING AREA FOR ALL FREIGHT GOING WEST OVER THE ALLEGHENIES, WHICH IS TO SAY IT WAS DIRTY, NOISY, ROUGH. CHURCHES IN INDUSTRIAL TOWNS ARE NOT OFTEN PRETTY. THE EXTERIOR WAS BLACK, THE STONE ENCRUSTED WITH DECADES OF THE SOOT AND ASH WHICH FELL CONSTANTLY ON THE TOWN. INSIDE, IT WAS NOT WHAT ONE WOULD CALL BREATHTAKING OR BEAUTIFUL. IT WAS TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY METHODIST, PRETTY DULL, PRETTY SENTIMENTAL, AND LIKE THE REST OF THE CITY, DIRTY. Later - when he returned to the PC - it was similarly, industrial grade + not what you would call pretty - certainly no church in the Midwest

SO, WHY DID HE LOVE THAT HYMN?

Title all the pictures were of little blond English children, sitting around an Anglo Saxon

WHAT THAT HYMN IS ABOUT I THINK - THAT NOSTALGIC, SENTIMENTAL IMAGE OF A LITTLE, RURAL, WOODEN CHURCH SWEETLY CALLING CHILDREN - WHAT THAT IS ABOUT IS A UNIVERSAL DISAFFECTION WITH THE REALITY OF THE CHURCH. HE WENT DUTIFULLY, BUT NOT WITHOUT COMPLAINING. CHURCH WAS NOT HIS FAVORITE PLACE TO BE. FROM THE WAY HE SANG, "COME, COME, COME TO THE CHURCH IN THE WILDWOOD," YOU WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT HE WOULD HAVE BEEN WILD ABOUT IT. THE TRUTH IS, HE STARTED LOOKING AT HIS WATCH THE MINUTE WE SAT DOWN AND IF IT WENT ON TOO LONG, LET US AND EVERYONE AROUND US KNOW HIS IMPATIENCE WITH DEEP SIGHS, UNTIL FINALLY HE GOT OUT HIS BIG RAILROAD POCKET WATCH AND WOUND IT, A LOUD, PENETRATING SOUND, WHICH SIGNALED EVEN THE PREACHER THAT IT WAS TIME FOR THIS TRAIN TO PULL INTO THE STATION AND STOP.

to the Chagrin of my mother + my brother's + my sheer delight. We couldn't wait till Dad pulled out that watch + wound it!

THE TRUTH IS THAT HE WASN'T WILD ABOUT THE INSTITUTIONAL EXPRESSION OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION - THE CHURCH. HE WOULD HAVE HAD A ONE-WORD ANSWER TO THE QUESTION I HAVE POSED. "DO YOU HAVE TO BELONG TO THE CHURCH TO BE A CHRISTIAN?" "NO."

MY DAD'S CONDITION, I HAVE SUBSEQUENTLY LEARNED, IS WIDESPREAD AND DEEP HISTORICALLY. HE HAS LOTS OF COMPANY. THE CONDITION HAS A NAME. IT IS CALLED "THE SCANDAL OF PARTICULARITY." AND IT GOES TO THE HEART OF CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

C. S. LEWIS'S CLASSIC SCREWTAPE LETTERS IS A CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN A SENIOR DEVIL AND HIS NEPHEW ABOUT FIGHTING FOR THE SOUL OF A NEW CHRISTIAN. LISTEN TO THE DEVIL - ON THE TOPIC OF THE CHURCH:

"ONE OF OUR GREAT ALLIES AT PRESENT IS THE CHURCH ITSELF. DO NOT MISUNDERSTAND ME. I DO NOT MEAN THE CHURCH AS WE SEE HER SPREAD OUT THROUGH ALL TIME. ALL YOUR (MAN) SEES IS THE HALF FINISHED SHAM GOTHIC (BUILDING). WHEN HE GOES INSIDE HE SEES THE LOCAL GROCER WITH A RATHER OILY EXPRESSION ON HIS FACE BUSTLING UP TO OFFER HIM ONE SHINY LITTLE BOOK CONTAINING A LITURGY NEITHER OF THEM UNDERSTANDS... WHEN HE GETS TO HIS PEW AND LOOKS AROUND HIM HE SEES JUST THAT SELECTION OF HIS NEIGHBORS WHOM HE HAS HITHERTO AVOIDED. YOU WANT TO LEAN PRETTY HEAVILY ON THOSE NEIGHBORS. MAKE HIS MIND FLIT TO AND FRO BETWEEN AN EXPRESSION LIKE 'THE BODY OF CHRIST' AND THE ACTUAL FACES IN THE NEXT PEW." [P. 8, 9]

The particularity of Christ- Jesus the X -
not the Greek concept of logos- the eternal word -
but the historic Jesus - a particular Jew in
what the the theologians call the
Scandal of Particularity - + it transposes
to the church -

ALMOST EVERYBODY, GOES THE ARGUMENT, LIKES THE GENERAL IDEA OF GOD AND LOVE. EVERYBODY LIKES NOBLE PRINCIPLES. CHRISTIANITY, HOWEVER, IS NOT ABOUT NOBLE PRINCIPLES. IT IS ABOUT A PALESTINIAN JEW BY THE NAME OF JESUS. THERE ARE, IN FACT, NO ABSTRACTIONS, NO BROAD CONCEPTS, NOT EVEN ANY NOBLE PRINCIPLES IN THE BIBLE. THE BIBLE PRESENTS STRIKING PARTICULARITIES: A PEOPLE, A HISTORY, A LAW, A BIRTH, A LIFE, A DEATH - AND THEN A PEOPLE AGAIN, A CHURCH. THAT'S WHAT THE BIBLE IS ABOUT.

DUKE UNIVERSITY CHAPLAIN, WILLIAM WILLIMON, WRITES:

"MANY APPROVE OF BOTH THE IDEA OF FOLLOWING CHRIST AND THE CONCEPT OF THE CHURCH. BUT THEY ARE HORRIFIED BY THE SQUALID PARTICULARS."

AUTHOR ANNIE DILLARD, WHO GREW UP

— Shadyside - Pittsburg

IN A PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, PULLED BACK FROM THE WHOLE PROCESS, AND RECENTLY JOINED THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, WROTE AN ESSAY IN A COLLECTION, MODERN AMERICAN WRITERS ON THE NEW TESTAMENT (INCARNATION). DILLARD WROTE:

"WHAT A PITY THAT SO HARD ON THE HEELS OF CHRIST COME THE CHRISTIANS. THERE IS NO BREATHER. THE DISCIPLES TURN INTO THE EARLY CHRISTIANS BETWEEN ONE RUSHED VERSE AND ANOTHER. WHAT A DISMAYING PITY... THEY SET OUT ALMOST IMMEDIATELY TO TAKE OVER THE WORLD, AND THEY PRETTY MUCH DID IT. THEY CONQUERED EMPERORS, RAISED ARMIES, LINED THEIR POCKETS WITH REAL MONEY, DID EVIL THINGS LARGE AND SMALL, IN EVERY CENTURY INCLUDING THIS ONE. THEY ARE SMUG AND BUSY, JUST LIKE US, AND WHO COULD BELIEVE IN THEM?" [P. 36]

e calls sitting in balcony w Sr. High friends - as th adults - country club set. (Bridge parties, societal party-goers pretended to pray... + writes

THE TRUTH IS THE CHURCH HAS ALWAYS BEEN A BIT OF AN EMBARRASSMENT. | THAT IS THE TREMENDOUS APPEAL OF ~~TELEVISION~~ the televangelists ~~RELIGION~~, I THINK. | YOU CAN HAVE JESUS WITHOUT THE CHURCH. | YOU CAN HAVE YOUR SALVATION WITHOUT ALL THE MESSY NUISANCE OF STEWARDSHIP AND PLEDGES AND THE LATEST PARKING LOT ARGUMENT AND THE BOILER MALFUNCTIONING. | IT'S A GOOD DEAL ACTUALLY: | NEVER HAVE TO LEAVE YOUR ARM CHAIR, | CAN HEAR WHAT YOU WANT TO HEAR, PUSH MUTE WHEN YOU DON'T WANT TO HEAR AND THEN, IF YOU FEEL LIKE IT, SEND IN A CHECK.

× you can get all fired up about Jesus + all mushy about your own salvation - without the tedium of committee meetings + stewardship promises

THE TRUTH IS THE CHURCH IS NEVER QUITE WHAT IT OUGHT TO BE, AND NO ONE KNOWS THAT BETTER THAN CHURCH PEOPLE. AS A MATTER OF FACT, AFTER THE ANTI-INSTITUTIONALISM OF THE PAST FEW DECADES I THINK THERE IS MORE SELF-RIGHTEOUS

RELIGIOUS SMUGNESS OUTSIDE THE CHURCH THAN THERE IS INSIDE. TIME WAS WHEN CHURCH PEOPLE LOOKED DOWN THEIR NOSES AT NON-CHURCH PEOPLE. TODAY, HOWEVER, THE PERSON ON THE OUTSIDE IS INCLINED TO SAY, "I MAY NOT BE PERFECT, BUT AT LEAST I'M NOT A HYPOCRITICAL CHURCH MEMBER."

Can you be Xian w/o Church?

IN 1869 THE FIRST VATICAN COUNCIL SAID "EXTRA ECCLESIAM NULLA SALUS." ("THERE IS NO SALVATION OUTSIDE THE CHURCH.") - But that's not exclusively R.C. JOHN CALVIN SAID IT TOO AND BELIEVED IT. HE MIGHT DEFINE CHURCH DIFFERENTLY, BUT HE BELIEVED IT. WILLIMON SAYS THAT CHURCH PEOPLE, MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE, KNOW THAT IS PATENT NONSENSE; THAT WHEN THE CHURCH SAYS THAT, THE CHURCH IS SAYING MORE THAN IT KNOWS. WE PRESBYTERIANS ARE QUITE HAPPY, ACTUALLY, TO LEAVE THE MATTER OF SALVATION IN THE HANDS OF OUR GOD WHO WE KNOW AND TRUST TO BE GRACIOUS, JUST, FORGIVING, AND LOVING.

AND LOVING

~~SO OUR~~ The REFORMATION POSITION IS THAT OF COURSE THERE IS SALVATION OUTSIDE THE CHURCH. THAT'S NOT REALLY THE QUESTION I POSED. ("DO YOU HAVE TO BELONG TO THE CHURCH TO BE A CHRISTIAN?") AND TO ANSWER THAT LET'S LOOK BRIEFLY AT WHAT the Book says ~~SCRIPTURE~~ SAYS ABOUT CHURCH.

IN THE GOSPELS, VERY LITTLE. ~~WE HEARD THE CRITICAL TEXT THIS MORNING.~~ JESUS SAYS TO PETER: ("YOU ARE A ROCK AND ON THIS ROCK I'LL BUILD A CHURCH.") THE WORD CHURCH IS "EKKLESIA" IN GREEK. IT MEANS ("THOSE WHO ARE CALLED OUT.") IT IS USED ONLY THREE TIMES IN THE GOSPELS, ALL THREE IN MATTHEW. BIBLICAL SCHOLARS HAVE BEEN EYING IT SUSPICIOUSLY FOR CENTURIES. MATTHEW IS CLEARLY PETER'S FRIEND. THE ACCOUNT IS WRITTEN PERHAPS FIFTY YEARS AFTER THE FACT, DURING THE PERIOD OF THE CHURCH'S ORGANIZATION,

one time -

THAT IS TO SAY. | SO MAYBE MATTHEW JUST STICKS THAT IN THERE TO ENHANCE HIS FRIEND'S POSITION. \ AND WHEN YOU KNOW THE CHURCH AS INTIMATELY AS A MINISTER DOES, YOU DO WONDER ON OCCASION IF THIS COULD POSSIBLY BE WHAT JESUS MEANT.

I'm no authority but → I BELIEVE THAT JESUS SAID IT OR SOMETHING VERY CLOSE TO IT. \\ I BELIEVE HE CALLED PETER A ROCK AND I LIKE TO RECALL THAT THE ROCK PETER WAS, WAS PRETTY ROUGH, \ PRETTY CRUMBLY AT TIMES; THAT A CHURCH BUILT ON HIM HAS TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT HE WASN'T EXACTLY CONSISTENTLY STRONG AND FAITHFUL: \ ~~HE~~ Peter WAS THOROUGHLY HUMAN. \ WHAT I BELIEVE ABSOLUTELY IS THAT JESUS GATHERED A COMPANY OF MEN AND WOMEN. \ THERE IS NO ARGUING THAT A COMPANY GATHERED AROUND HIM, FOLLOWED HIM FOR THREE YEARS AS HE WALKED AROUND GALILEE, HELPED HIM TEACH AND HEAL, AND IN THE PROCESS OF FOLLOW-

ING BONDED TO ONE ANOTHER IN A UNIQUE WAY. I AM THOROUGHLY CONVINCED THAT JESUS INVITED MEN AND WOMEN TO BECOME FOLLOWERS. I SEE NO EVIDENCE AT ALL THAT HE EVER ASKED ANYBODY TO BELIEVE THINGS ABOUT HIM AS A PREREQUISITE TO FOLLOWING. I CONCLUDE ON THE BASIS OF THE EVIDENCE I READ THAT MEN AND WOMEN BECAME BELIEVERS WHILE THEY WERE FOLLOWERS, SOME MORE THOROUGHLY THAN OTHERS, SOME WITH INTELLECTUAL SOPHISTICATION, MANY WITH SIMPLE CHILD-LIKE TRUST, AND THAT WHAT THEY BELIEVED ABOUT HIM WAS NOT AS IMPORTANT AS THEIR FOLLOWING, THEIR BELONGING TO THE COMPANY OF THE COMMITTED.

So I THINK MY QUESTION MAKES NO SENSE. CHURCH IS WHAT A CHRISTIAN IS. A CHRISTIAN IS A FOLLOWER OF JESUS WHO BELONGS TO THE COMMUNITY, THE COMPANY OF FOLLOWERS.

Do you promise to be Christ's faithful follower? We ask the members

~~WHEN THE TITLE OF THIS SERMON WAS PUBLISHED IN THE NEWSLETTER, I HEARD FROM A GOOD FRIEND~~ AND SUPPORTER OF THIS CHURCH, WHO IS NOT AN OFFICIAL MEMBER FOR REASONS OF THEOLOGY. ~~HE WROTE, "I'M INTERESTED IN YOUR TOPIC. I'M EVEN MORE INTERESTED IN THIS - DO YOU HAVE TO BE A CHRISTIAN TO BE A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH?'"~~ AND THE NEW TESTAMENT ANSWER IS SIMPLY THAT THE CHURCH IS THE COMPANY OF THOSE WHO WANT TO FOLLOW JESUS - THAT A CHRISTIAN IS A FOLLOWER - A FRIEND WHO IN COMPANY WITH THE OTHER FOLLOWERS OF JESUS, IS TRYING TO LIVE IN FAITHFULNESS TO HIM.

CAN'T I DO THAT ALONE? CAN'T I BE AN INDIVIDUAL FOLLOWER, DOING MY OWN THING? WHY DO I HAVE TO GET MIXED-UP WITH OTHER PEOPLE? THE REASON IS THAT OTHER PEOPLE SEEM TO BE THE POINT OF THE

have a good friend, +

He's Jewish

He's always asking me - do I have to be a Xian to join your church?

C.S. Lewis's point —

Why can't I just live a good life - pay my bills + treat my neighbors politely?

WHOLE EXERCISE. | THE HUMAN COMMUNITY SEEMS TO BE WHY GOD SENT A SON TO LIVE AMONG US IN THE FIRST PLACE. | IT WAS NOT, THAT IS TO SAY, TO MAKE INDIVIDUALS FEEL GOOD ABOUT WHERE THEY ARE GOING TO SPEND ETERNITY, SO MUCH AS IT WAS TO RECREATE THE HUMAN RACE, | TO ESTABLISH A COLONY OF HEAVEN IN HUMAN HISTORY, | A VISIBLE REMINDER OF THE CREATOR'S PLAN FOR THE WHOLE PROJECT TO LOVE PEACE AND PRACTICE JUSTICE.

TO BELIEVE IN JESUS - | TO TURN TO JESUS - | TO FOLLOW JESUS | IS, SIMPLY, TO RECONNECT WITH THE HUMAN RACE. | TO KNOW JESUS CHRIST AS LORD AND SAVIOR IS TO KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOUR BROTHER OR SISTER. || AND IT IS CHURCH - THE COMPANY - WHICH IS THE VISIBLE REMINDER, | AND THE PLACE WHERE THAT REALITY IS ACTED OUT EVERY WEEK, WEEK IN AND WEEK OUT; | A COMMUNITY GATHERING IN LOVE AND FORGIVENESS

at the same time

at the same time

NESS AND FOR AN HOUR AT LEAST - IN GOD'S PRAISE AND ADORATION - BECOMING WHAT GOD INTENDS FOR THE WHOLE CREATION. I CAN'T RESIST MY FAVORITE MARK TWAIN VIGNETTE. PEOPLE WERE ALWAYS ASKING HIM WHY HE DIDN'T BELONG TO A CHURCH. TWAIN SAID IF HEAVEN WAS LIKE THE METHODIST CHURCH DOWN THE BLOCK, HE WAS GLAD HE WASN'T GOING THERE. THE CHURCH CATHOLIC - UNIVERSAL - THE CHURCH WHICH TRANSCENDS ROMAN - PRESBYTERIAN - LUTHERAN - BAPTIST - IS THE VISIBLE SIGN OF GOD'S RECONCILIATION, A PICTURE OF THE HUMAN FAMILY FORGIVEN, RECREATED, REDEEMED AND NOW POISED TO GO INTO THE WORLD AND SAVE IT FROM ITSELF.

OF COURSE, IT'S A SCANDAL. SHOW ME AN INSTITUTION THAT ISN'T ON OCCASION. ETHICIST JAMES GUSTAVSON HAS WRITTEN THAT "THE CHURCH IS NOT ONLY A DIVINE COMMUNITY, IT IS ALSO A HUMAN, NATURAL,

and if you have ever attended a meeting of your Presbytery - or of our synod or our synod as a committee - you know that

POLITICAL COMMUNITY." [TREASURES IN EARTHEN VESSELS] OR AS ONE WAG PUT IT, THE CHURCH IS LIKE NOAH'S ARK IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FLOOD. THE SMELL INSIDE IS SO AWFUL YOU MIGHT LEAVE EXCEPT FOR WHAT'S GOING ON OUTSIDE.

May I make my testimony - my confession - "I believe in the church" - I am a

So, I AM A CHURCHMAN, NOT BECAUSE THE CHURCH IS PERFECT, BUT BECAUSE I'M TRYING TO FOLLOW JESUS. AND IN THE SAME WAY I HAVE COME TO TERMS WITH HIS PARTICULARITY, HIS HUMANNESS, THE WORD MADE FLESH AND DWELLING AMONG US, SO I MUST ACCOMMODATE TO THE INSTITUTIONALITY OF HIS CHURCH.

I AM A CHURCHMAN IN SPITE OF MY OWN LIFE-LONG LOVER'S QUARREL WITH THE CHURCH BECAUSE I REALLY DO BELIEVE THE WORLD DESPERATELY NEEDS THE CHURCH AND THAT THERE IS A SENSE IN WHICH THE CHURCH AND THE FAITH IT REPRESENTS IS THE WORLD'S ONLY HOPE. I DO BELIEVE THE

and I've been impatient w/ the church for years

Bible is right - the real danger in the world is always idolatry

~~DANGER IS ALWAYS IDOLATRY,~~ MAKING A GOD OUT OF SOMETHING - IDEOLOGY, FOR INSTANCE, OR RACE, FOR INSTANCE, OR AFFLUENCE, OR SECURITY. I BELIEVE THAT HISTORY TEACHES A VERY CLEAR LESSON THAT CIVILIZATIONS HAVE WITHIN THEM THE SEEDS OF THEIR OWN ULTIMATE DESTRUCTION, APART FROM SOME LOVINGLY CRITICAL AND HOPEFULLY REDEMPTIVE PRESENCE LIKE THE CHURCH. I BELIEVE OUR CULTURE, IF LEFT TO ITS OWN DEVICES, WOULD SIMPLY DESTROY ITSELF. APART FROM RELIGIOUS FAITH I SEE LITTLE REASON TO ASSUME THAT THE CULTURE WILL GENERATE THE ENERGY AND IMPETUS TO BECOME LESS MATERIALISTIC, LESS GREEDY, LESS NARCISSISTIC, LESS VIOLENT, AND MORE COMPASSIONATE, JUST, TOUGH AND RESILIENT. PROFESSOR JAMES FOWLER, IN A BOOK ON VALUES PUT IT THIS WAY. "WHEN WE PREPARE OUR YOUNG FOR THE GOOD LIFE, THIS IS THE ADVICE OUR CULTURE

GIVES. 'BE SURE TO MAJOR IN SOMETHING MARKETABLE. GET A BACKGROUND THAT COMBINES BUSINESS AND COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY. KEEP YOUR RESUME ALWAYS READY. IF YOU ARE GOING TO THE TOP YOU MUST BE WITHIN STRIKING DISTANCE BY THE TIME YOU ARE THIRTY-FIVE. YOU DON'T HAVE TIME TO DILLY-DALLY. DON'T STAY WITH ONE COMPANY TOO LONG. LOYALTY CAN BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE IF YOU WANT TO GET AHEAD. YOU DON'T HAVE TIME FOR VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY.'"

THE CHURCH, ON THE OTHER HAND, FOWLER SAYS, IS A COUNTER-CULTURE AND ASKS A VERY DIFFERENT SET OF QUESTIONS.

"WHAT SEEM TO BE YOUR GIFTS? WHAT KINDS OF THINGS DO YOU DO WELL? WHAT KINDS OF ACTIVITIES GIVE YOU A SENSE OF WORTHINESS? WHAT KINDS OF THINGS DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU AND GOD CAN DO WITH YOUR LIFE THAT WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR

GOOD IN OUR WORLD?" [BECOMING ADULT, BECOMING CHRISTIAN, P. 143]

I THINK IN ALL SERIOUSNESS, THOSE QUESTIONS ARE OUR ONLY HOPE, AND THAT APART FROM A CHURCH TO KEEP ASKING THEM, OUR CULTURE IS HEADED FOR SELF-DESTRUCTION.

I AM A CHURCHMAN BECAUSE I CAN'T DO IT ALONE. OH, I CAN SURVIVE AND TAKE CARE OF MYSELF. I CAN EVEN DO PRETTY WELL. BUT I CERTAINLY CAN'T DO MUCH BY MYSELF TO FIX THE WORLD, TO BECOME PART OF THE SOLUTION INSTEAD OF PART OF THE PROBLEM, TO HEAL THE SICK, AND BIND UP WOUNDS, BY MYSELF. AND I DON'T KNOW HOW TO BE A LIGHT IN THE CITY OR IN ANY DARKNESS BY MYSELF. BUT WHEN I AM WITH THE CHURCH, I AM FIRST OF ALL, ONE BRIEF VOICE, IN A MAGNIFICENT CHORUS OF VOICES WHICH HAS BEEN SINGING GOD'S PRAISE FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS. MY POOR PRAYING AND

SINGING AND BELIEVING JOIN THAT WONDERFUL SONG OF PRAISE. | AND WHEN I SAY THE CREED, MY VOICE JOINS AN AFFIRMATION THAT HAS BEEN MADE EVERY DAY - EVERY HOUR OF EVERY DAY FOR 2,000 YEARS. || AND WHEN I BRING MY POOR FAITH TO GOD - MY SACRIFICE ON THE ALTAR - MY MONEY IN THE PLATE - SOMETHING INCREDIBLE HAPPENS. | I BECOME A HEALER OF THE SICK. | I HOUSE THE HOMELESS, | AND CLOTHE THE NAKED. | MY LITTLE LIGHT JOINS A BEACON OF LIGHT WHICH SHINES IN EVERY DARKNESS.

I AM A CHURCHMAN, AND I WILL GIVE MY HEART, AND MORE OF MY RESOURCES THAN I WILL GIVE TO ANYTHING ELSE, BECAUSE I BELIEVE THAT JESUS CHRIST IS THE HOPE OF THE WORLD, NOT AS A PHILOSOPHIC ABSTRACTION. | BUT I BELIEVE IN THE BODY - THE ORGANISM - THE COMMUNITY WHICH LIVES AND LOVES AND SERVES AND IS THE HOPE OF THE WORLD'S SALVATION AND RECONCILIATION AND PEACE.

~~AND PEACE.~~

SINEAD O'CONNOR RIPPED UP A PICTURE OF THE POPE AND BECAME A HOUSEHOLD NAME, BUT ~~DID YOU SEE THE PICTURES OF THOSE~~ TWO ROMAN CATHOLIC BROTHERS THE NIGHT DANTRELL DAVIS, WAS SHOT, DOING WHAT THEY DO EVERY NIGHT AT CABRINI GREEN, WALKING BETWEEN THE BUILDINGS, AND WHEN THERE IS GUNFIRE BETWEEN GANGS, WALKING TOWARD IT, OFFERING THEIR OWN LIVES IN THE PLACE OF CHILDREN LIKE DANTRELL DAVIS AND THE 120 OTHERS WHO HAVE DIED. THAT'S WHAT CHURCH IS.

OR THE NEW ALBANIA BISHOPS - IN JAIL FOR 40 YEARS.

"THE BODY THEY MAY KILL.... GOD'S TRUTH ABIDETH STILL," MARTIN LUTHER WROTE, AND THE CHURCH HAS DONE THAT TOO: DIETRICH BONHOEFFER AND CONFESSING CHURCH IN GERMANY, STANDING UP, ALONE,

TO THE THIRD REICH; ARCHBISHOP OSCAR ROMERO, MURDERED AT MASS IN HIS CATHEDRAL IN EL SALVADOR; MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., OUR MARTYR, WHOSE INSPIRATION AND SPIRITUAL HOME WAS ALWAYS THE CHURCH. THAT'S WHAT CHURCH CAN BE.

AND I BELIEVE THE WORLD'S PEACE DOES COME - AS IT CAME IN AN UNOBTRUSIVE BIRTH IN A REMOTE JUDEAN TOWN CALLED BETHLEHEM. I BELIEVE THE WORLD'S AND THE CITY'S PEACE BEGINS WHEN CHILDREN ~~FROM CABRINI GREEN COME TO THIS CHURCH AND LEARN TO READ AND LEARN THAT THEY~~ ARE NOT ALONE - THAT THERE ARE HUMAN BEINGS IN THIS CULTURE - THIS WORLD - THIS CITY - WHO CARE DEEPLY FOR THEM AND LOVE THEM AND KNOW THEIR NAMES.

this church shows the love of God to the weakest of its citizens - shows the children - the homeless - the addicted - the victims of AIDS that they

I BELIEVE THAT CHURCHES ARE A LIGHT IN THE CITY. I DON'T THINK THAT'S A MARKETING SLOGAN. I THINK IT'S THE TRUTH.

So - yes - the church - this blessed - exasperating - human - institution is what Christ became -

And yes - God bless you

FOR BEING

AND I PRESUME TO INVITE YOU, IF YOU ARE A PART OF THE COMPANY, TO RENEW YOUR FOR COMMITMENT, YOUR LOVE AND LOYALTY.

God bless you - the Church for

AND I PRESUME TO INVITE YOU TO BRING WHAT YOU HAVE, GIVE WHAT YOU HAVE; YOUR FAITH, YOUR HOPE, YOUR DETERMINATION, YOUR YEARNING FOR PEACE FOR YOURSELF AND FOR THE WORLD. I INVITE YOU TO BRING YOUR RESOURCES, THE GIFTS YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN AND TO LAY THEM ON THE ALTAR. I PRESUME TO INVITE YOU TO COMMIT, TO GIVE, TO FOLLOW THE ONE WHO PROMISED;

"ON A ROCK LIKE THIS I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH, AND THE GATES OF HELL WILL NOT PREVAIL AGAINST IT."

You are a reason + a hopeful about your city.

Together we can a reason to be hopeful about the world's future

Our Lord looked at Peter + said - "On a rock